

Vice President Visits Theodore:

A month after President Barack Obama toured the U.S. Coast Guard Gulf oil spill incident response staging area in Theodore, Alabama, Vice President Joe Biden followed suit. Last Thursday, Mr. Biden and National Incident Commander Admiral Thad Allen, viewed operations at the facility located south of Mobile and the vice president met afterwards with local fishermen and small business owners affected by the spill.

While Mr. Biden's short stay in Alabama was briefer than the president's trip in mid June, it was encouraging that he included residents directly impacted by the crisis, rather than simply conducting photo-ops.

Unfortunately, I was not able to join the vice president on this trip due to votes in the House of Representatives. I hope the vice president took to heart the personal stories expressed to him by real people suffering from the dramatic drop in business as a result of the spill.

As we approach 100 days since the blow out of the Deepwater Horizon well, the frustration over the slow pace in which the federal government and BP have been handling the clean-up and the claims processing is as thick as the summer haze hanging in the South Alabama air.

The federal government has made a commitment to the long-term economic and environmental recovery of the Gulf Coast states and dialogue with the administration must continue long after the oil well is shut off if the businesses and families are to see a return to the way of life we all cherish.

Wellhead Capped:

Gulf Coast residents have learned to take any positive developments in the effort to cap the gushing deepwater oil well with a large measure of caution. However, the recent news that BP has successfully (if temporarily) capped the wellhead was very welcome. Equally encouraging was the unexpected announcement that shrimping has returned to Mobile Bay.

One continued concern is the impact of Gulf hurricanes and tropical storms on the ongoing skimming operations and on the effort to permanently close the well. Strengthening Tropical Storm Bonnie may test containment and clean-up operations.

With the possible containment of the well, more resources and attention can finally be directed to the ongoing clean-up of our beaches and environmentally sensitive areas. The enormity of the task is daunting and the impact of the spill will be felt in our region for years to come.

I have made clear to administration and Coast Guard officials that the people of the Gulf Coast expect their government to treat the spill clean-up and ongoing economic recovery to our area with the highest level of urgency. Even though oil may no longer be flowing from the underwater well, the assault on our coastal economy has not let up.

As I noted two weeks ago, I have also contacted President Obama, National Incident

Commander Admiral Thad Allen and EPA Director Lisa Jackson to express great dissatisfaction over the delays in deploying oil skimmers in the Gulf and I have called on the administration to remove all bureaucratic barriers which are preventing or slowing foreign and domestic oil skimming vessels from the clean-up battle.

More than three months have passed since the blow out of the Gulf well and there can be no excuse for further delays.

Alabama Deserves Fair Share of Oil and Gas Royalties:

The oil spill dramatically demonstrated how oil producing Gulf states, like Alabama, can be directly impacted by a rupture at any of the thousands of offshore wells. Even as the Gulf of Mexico accounts for nearly 1/4 of the nation's total oil production, Gulf states which are home to such oil drilling are still forced to shoulder greater risk without adequate compensation.

In 2006, Congress passed the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act, setting aside nearly 38 percent of royalties from new Gulf oil and natural gas drilling leases for Gulf oil producing states - Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. Unfortunately, under the law, the royalty payments don't start flowing until 2017.

Alabama and other Gulf oil drilling states need this money now to help offset the negative impact of the spill as well as to pay for response efforts and limit damage from future oil spills.

I'm supporting efforts in Congress to speed up the payment of these oil and gas drilling royalties to the Gulf states and also apply them to all Gulf oil and gas wells rather than just new ones.

As long as our state is on the front lines of America's vital energy production, Alabama must be appropriately compensated for its risk.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.